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AMO's Response To The Waste Section of the Ontario Round Table on Environment and Economy: CHALLENGE PAPER

Association of Municipalities of Ontario
February 1991

MISSION STATEMENT

AMO unites Ontario's municipalities.

We take pride in promoting, supporting and enhancing strong and effective municipal government.

We provide strategic leadership by:

- developing and effectively promoting responsive quality policy;
- informing and educating governments, the media and the public;
- marketing innovative and beneficial services.

Our elected representatives, municipal officials and association staff form a team which values and respects:

- diversity and local autonomy;
- fairness and equity;
- consultation;
- consensus;
- co-operation.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ontario Round Table on the Environment and Economy's (ORTEE) Challenge Paper on sustainable development in Ontario was released during 1990. The following paper is the Association of Municipalities of Ontario's (AMO) response to the six guiding principles and waste section of that report.

This response analyzes the six principles in light of AMO's waste management policies. AMO accepts the first principle of anticipation and prevention and has consistently promoted the second principle of full cost accounting. AMO agrees with the principle of informed decision-making and has policies which reflect the fourth principle of living off the interest. AMO agrees with the explanation of the fifth principle, quality of development over quantity, but urges ORTEE to better define this category. AMO also agrees with the last principle, respect for nature and the rights of future generations.

In the "Next Steps" section, AMO recommends that ORTEE include municipal representatives on its sectoral task forces. It also recommends that generic guidelines be developed for the "Codes of Practice".

In the "Waste" section of ORTEE's Challenge Paper, AMO agrees that waste should be decreased. It applauds ORTEE for referring to the "4Rs" hierarchy of reduction, reuse, recycling and recovery of energy-from-waste, which is a hierarachy AMO has long promoted in its waste management report series. AMO also notes the other policy directions ORTEE has suggested which AMO's policies have consistently supported. AMO urges ORTEE to find practical ways to implement any targets which might be used to measure progress, and it comments on various measures which the Challenge Paper has cited as examples. In the final part of this section, AMO also notes a number of waste management measures which Ontario's municipalities have been taking.

In conclusion, AMO applauds ORTEE's work and welcomes further opportunities it may have to work with the Ontario Round Table on Environment and Economy as it develops Ontario's sustainable development policy.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Ontario Round Table on Environment and Economy (ORTEE) is a group which advises the provincial government on how sustainable development can be implemented in Ontario. Comprised of 21 members of environmental organizations, industry, labour, agriculture, aboriginal peoples, academia and government, it aims to link economic and environmental decisions to develop a strategy which supports both a vigorous economy and healthy environment.

During 1990, ORTEE issued a Challenge Paper which aimed to provide a foundation for implementing sustainable development in Ontario. The paper noted that many environmental problems - such as toxic contaminants, acid rain and waste - have resulted from past decisions made without considering their impact on the environment. The paper emphasized that people must give the environment more consideration when making economic and planning decisions.

2 AMO'S RESPONSE

A provincial sustainable development policy could impact all sectors of the province, including municipalities, so the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) is providing a municipal response to the Challenge Paper. This response was initiated by the AMO Ad Hoc Waste Management Committee and applies only to the waste section of the Challenge Paper and the six guiding principles which apply to this section. AMO planned to respond to the rest of the Challenge Paper in another document.

3 THE SIX GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Challenge Paper presents "Six Guiding Principles" which apply to the paper's six subject areas of water, food and agriculture, forest communities, waste, the atmosphere, and cities and towns.

Principle #1: Anticipation and Prevention

AMO agrees with this principle, which calls for environmental considerations to be central in economic decision-making. The Challenge Paper says effective environmental assessment must be applied to private and public decisions to prevent expensive future clean-up action. AMO notes the provincial government's Environmental Assessment process already provides that in the waste area.

Principle #2: Full Cost Accounting

The Challenge Paper encourages environmental and social costs, or potential environmental clean-up costs, to be included in market costs to prevent exploitation of environmental resources. It says subsidies and incentives which encourage non-sustainable forms of economic activity should be ended and a "polluter pay" principle enforced so an activity's "beneficiary" pays the full price, including the cost of resource use and environmental damage.

AMO notes that it has encouraged this principle through its waste management report series. In recommendations in these reports, AMO has urged municipalities to increase their tipping fees to cover the full costs of their waste management system. Ontario municipalities are doing this, and tipping fees - based on a "polluter pay" principle - have been increasing. Municipalities are also beginning to institute full cost-accounting systems for waste management.

Principle #3: Informed Decision-Making

AMO agrees with this principle, which states both short and long-term consequences of decisions must be considered, the public must be involved in decision-making, and governments - as well as others - must be accountable for the environmental impact of their decisions and projects. These are already principles which municipal governments address in their decision-making.

Principle #4: Living off the Interest (Doing Better With Less)

This principle notes people must "live off the interest" so they can maintain the resource and not degrade the environment. ORTEE says "doing better with less" involves reducing, reusing and recycling, and these are principles which AMO has actively promoted.

AMO has consistently said society should adopt the "4Rs" waste minimization hierarchy of reduce, reuse,

recycle, and then recovery of energy-from-waste, in that order. In that regard, reuse is better than recycling in that it saves resources. AMO notes ORTEE's examples of this principle - recycling through the Blue Box program and reuse of returned beer bottles - should be reversed so reuse takes precedence over recycling. AMO has promoted reuse through its recommendations and its work to encourage governments to implement deposit systems for beverage containers of all types. AMO believes this would encourage their return and reuse. In particular, AMO successfully urged the Ontario Minister of the Environment to again re-enforce the regulations requiring soft drink containers to be refillable. It has also asked for these regulations to be strengthened.

Principle #5: Quality of Development Over Quantity

AMO agrees with the explanation of this principle, which notes that creating a sustainable society will require changes in everyone's attitudes, expectations, behaviours, and values and that there should be more focus on quality of economic development. However, it urges ORTEE to better define the title of the principle as these terms mean different things to different people.

In this principle, ORTEE calls for people to reduce the amount of waste they produce and shift to products and services which have minimum impact on the environment. AMO has called for such activities through its waste management recommendations. It has urged governments and the private sector to conduct waste audits of their operations to identify the solid waste they produce so they can reduce it.

It has recommended that they introduce a "4Rs" waste minimization program to minimize the amount of waste they generate and that they also develop comprehensive procurement policies which promote goods and services favouring the hierarchy. AMO has also recommended that the private sector design its products to increase their durability, longevity, and ability to be repaired to minimize the solid waste produced by consumer-used goods.

Principle #6: Respect for Nature and the Rights of Future Generations

AMO agrees with this principle, which says people must sustain ecology to protect the rights of future generations, the environment must be considered in making decisions, and society needs to find a way to

resolve issues where the perspectives, lifestyles and values among groups are fundamentally different.

4 NEXT STEPS

In this section of the Challenge Paper, ORTEE said it will be presenting its paper to Ontario communities and establishing sectoral task forces to start working on how sustainable development can be implemented.

These task forces will consider the question of "who pays" for pollution control, and AMO urges ORTEE to include as many municipal representatives as possible on these as this question is a major one impacting municipalities.

To complement these steps, ORTEE has also recommended two actions, one of which is that:

> All Ontario organizations should adopt "Codes of Practice" for sustainable development and conduct a review of their policies, products, processes, procurement practices and other activities based on the six principles. These should be developed by early 1991.

AMO suggests ORTEE develop generic guidelines for these "Codes of Practice", which municipalities across the province can then adopt or modify. This would give municipalities a guideline to work with, but also leave them with the maximum flexibility necessary to best address their constituencies.

5 WASTE

5.1 Background

The Challenge Paper sees waste management as an expensive by-product of our current consumption-oriented society. It also notes that growing waste streams increase the burden on already over-taxed waste management systems.

Both AMO and municipalities have recognized the truth

of these observations and have been encouraging the decrease of the growing waste stream since it is often municipalities which must deal with the waste and problems resulting from over-taxed waste management systems.

5.2 Directions for Change

AMO applauds ORTEE for noting in its Challenge Paper that "the waste management hierarchy should be fully exploited in moving towards more sustainable levels of resource use within our economy." (p. 24) The hierarchy ORTEE cites is the "4Rs" hierarchy which AMO has been advocating - reduction, reuse, recycling, and where these options are not employable, recovery of useful energy and other resources before waste is disposed of in landfills.

The Challenge Paper also lists several other directions which could be instituted to help eliminate waste. These are:

- improve product durability, serviceability, usability and recyclability;
- improve process designs to reduce both the amounts of waste generated and their toxicity/flammability/corrosivity/radioactivity, and thereby improve in-plant efficiency and international competitiveness;
- reuse materials and products which cannot be reduced at source;
- recycle materials and products which can no longer be reused. At-source composting is an important component of recycling;
- where reduction, reuse and recycling options have been implemented, recover useful energy and other possible materials that can be productively used from the residual waste stream;
- more standardized packaging of commodity products to facilitate and improve the economics of their reuse;

- fully cost waste generation and disposal, and ensure that subsidies do not encourage waste production and disposal through conventional means;

- reduce the packaging of products;

- public and private sector purchase decisions should support markets generated by the reduction, reuse and recycling of materials and products;

- further directions and actions are required to improve the energy and material use efficiencies of our economy and to ensure greater sustainability of our natural resource base.

Most of these positions AMO has supported, and advocated, through its waste management report series. It has supported the "4Rs" waste minimization hierarchy which calls for reduction, reuse, recycling and recovery of energy-from-waste, in that order. It has called for improved product durability, serviceability, usability and recyclability, reduction of product packaging, and procurement policies which support the first 3Rs of the "4Rs" hierarchy. AMO has also called for the increase of municipal tipping fees to reflect the total life-cycle cost of municipal solid waste management systems. AMO would also like ORTEE to examine the appropriateness of using the round table model for public participation in the waste management field.

5.3 Measuring Our Progress

The Challenge Paper notes that we need indicators of sustainability, targets and timetables to measure our progress in moving towards sustainability in using and conserving natural resources. AMO notes that any targets which are identified should have some practical way to implement them.

The Challenge Paper cites several measures which have already been adopted:

- extension of the Blue Box program in organized municipalities to all houses, restaurants, apartments, offices and industrial sites by 1995.

AMO's Response: AMO notes that while municipalities have been introducing the Blue Box program, this system has several problems. These include availability of markets for items collected in the program, the low price offered for many of the products which are collected, and the fact municipal tax-payers are left paying the bulk of the cost for this system when the cost should more appropriately be borne by the industrial or commercial waste generator.

AMO adds the Blue Box program may not be the best way to achieve waste reduction in all of the sectors cited. In the municipal experience, bans have generated more success than the Blue Box system in reducing waste in the commercial and industrial sectors.

- 50% recycled content of paper and paper products, glass, plastics and metal used in packaging by 1995.

- the application of public and private sector procurement policies to encourage the manufacturing and use of products that contain recycled materials.

AMO's Response: AMO again encourages ORTEE to adopt the stance that materials should be reduced or reused before they are dealt with through recycling. However, in the case of procurement policies, it believes these should be introduced to encourage the use of the first 3Rs of the "4Rs" waste minimization hierarchy.

- 50% reduction in the generation of hazardous wastes in Ontario by 2000.

AMO's Response: AMO notes that dealing with hazardous waste is a quality as well as quantity issue It encourages ORTEE to move more toward dealing with the most hazardous wastes rather than setting an arbitrary goal which may not be dealing with the most dangerous hazardous wastes.

- the adoption of more aggressive waste reduction targets than those already in place. It suggests: 30% reduction by June 1990, 40% reduction by

June 1992, 50% reduction by June 1996, and 60% reduction by June 1998.

AMO's Response: AMO urges ORTEE to emphasize long-term rather than short-term reduction, since measures which contribute to meeting short-term goals may contradict those needed to meet long-term reduction targets. AMO suggests more research be done into the practicality of reaching these more extensive goals before such goals could be instituted. AMO also asks ORTEE to provide clarification as to how progress towards these goals can be measured.

AMO recommended in its latest waste management report, Municipal Solid Waste Management: Whose Problem Is It?, that the province should process its current waste reduction targets through the Environmental Assessment process, including public consultation. In that way, it could develop generic guidelines relative to waste diversion for municipalities. Accompanying this, AMO has also suggested the province should:

a) adopt and publish an official policy, or pass legislation which formally enshrines its provincial waste diversion goals;

b) develop methods to record progress toward these goals, state what the year of comparison is to be, and state what can and cannot be counted for meeting those diversion targets; and

c) develop, in concert with municipalities, implementation guidelines to meet these targets.

- institute a graduated waste management surcharge system that levies charges against producers of solid wastes as a means of internalizing the costs associated with their products and materials.

AMO's Response: AMO agrees that producers of solid waste, particularly the private sector, should pay the long-term costs of disposing of their products.

5.4 Examples of What is Already Being Done

The Challenge Paper notes several examples of what is already being done in the waste field by various sectors. However, the examples which it notes under the "Governments" section only concentrate on the provincial government and its organizations. They do not address any of the work regarding waste which municipalities are doing.

Municipalities have been making many strides in this area. Some examples of what they have been doing are:

- increasing their tipping fees to reflect the total life cycle cost of their solid waste management systems;
- instituting Blue Box programs;
- instituting household hazardous waste programs;
- urging the Ontario government to review the legislation governing them to grant them the authority to introduce the "4Rs" components of an integrated waste management system;
- beginning to develop an integrated waste management system with the "4Rs" waste minimization hierarchy as an integral part.

Some municipalities have also begun to:

- look at how waste audits can be conducted in their operations to reduce waste generation;
- help industries in their area implement waste audits;
- work with commercial waste haulers and their customers to find "4Rs" alternatives for many of the materials they previously discarded;
- work with other municipalities to institute/integrate waste management programs for a larger area;

- institute true cost accounting for their solid waste management systems.

6 CONCLUSION

AMO applauds the work which the Ontario Round Table on Environment and Economy is now doing to develop a sustainable development policy for the province. It has appreciated the opportunity to provide input into ORTEE's discussions and, because municipalities have much expertise in the waste area, AMO welcomes further opportunities it may have to work with ORTEE as ORTEE develops its strategy in the waste area.

Appendix A - Acknowledgments

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario would like to thank the members of its Ad Hoc Waste Management Committee who volunteered their time to produce this document. The members of the team were:

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